

**Testimony of Larry Crittenden  
Government Operations Committee  
Michigan House of Representatives  
September 19, 2006**

Chairman Drolet and Members of the House Government Operations Committee, my name is Larry Crittenden and I am the Communications Director of the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of House Bill 6465. We appreciate your support of local media, and by extension, your support of the citizens who have funded sports facilities through their tax dollars.

Earlier this year the National Football League announced that local videographers would no longer be allowed to cover football games from the sidelines, a practice that dates back several decades. During that time local stations have helped local football fans develop a strong relationship with the Detroit Lions and the NFL. In addition to live game coverage, fans have always enjoyed the diversity of stories that have been produced by local broadcasters for their own sportscasts and mid-week programs.

When we learned of the policy we immediately contacted the NFL and the Detroit Lions to appeal the decision. Our request to open up the sidelines was denied by the NFL.

Our concern goes beyond simply having video shot by local television stations for their own use, and here's why.

A major sporting event is a legitimate news event that deserves objective coverage by local media. If that event occurs in a publicly funded facility, local media should have the opportunity to cover it and not rely on other sources for all of its content.

We believe that the public has a right to expect coverage by local media. Further, the public likes to see angles and stories that would not otherwise be available through the network coverage. Even the NFL has been known to borrow video from local stations to supplement its own programs and archives.

The right of the public to expect and enjoy local media coverage is true of any sporting event that occurs in a publicly funded arena. Although the NFL policy brought the issue to the forefront, local broadcasters have been facing increasingly restrictive rules at other venues as well. We believe that your bill, HB 6465, would offer statutory guidance to teams and stadium operators and remind them about who owns the facilities.

As you consider this bill, we respectfully suggest that you alter or eliminate Sec. 7A (2) (B). Based on an opinion from our legal counsel, we are concerned that vague language in existing contracts between leagues or teams and stadium operators might be interpreted to allow an exemption from the intent of this legislation.

At the same time, we fully respect the rights of a league, a team and a network to protect copyrighted material. Our members have their own network affiliations, and they understand very well the need to protect copyrights.

However, we do not believe that sideline coverage by local media presents a threat to the broadcast rights that have been negotiated and secured among networks, leagues and teams.

Thank you again for your support of Michigan citizens and local broadcasters.